

State and National Champion Longleaf Pine Stands in Jasper County Longleaf Pine Park

By Anna King, Jasper County News

On Old Highway 15 between Bay Springs and Stringer lies the only tract of virgin longleaf pines in Jasper County. The Longleaf Pine Park, measuring around 2.5 acres, is home to several longleaf pines as old as 400 years. It has been a natural area since 1979.

The area was donated to the Bay Springs Improvement Club on May 14, 1932, by Gilchrist Fordney, a timber company. South Central District of the Mis-

issippi Forestry Commission Public Outreach Forester Ed Brown estimated that some trees were in their "grass stage" when Hernando Desoto first came to America.

Longleaf pines grow in coastal states, stretching from Texas to North Carolina. They are known for their slow growth, longer needles, and larger pine cones. Longleaf pines also thrive on periodic fires to clean off brush. Jasper County is located along the northern border of the longleaf region.

In the Longleaf Pine Park stands the State Champion Longleaf Pine. Reaching 105 feet tall, 9.7 feet in circumference, and 43.7 feet at its crown, the pine is also listed in

the American Forests' National Register of Big Trees as the nation's largest longleaf pine. The recognition comes through the Natural Heritage Program through the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks.

The park sits in Beat 4 of Jasper County, now marked by a new sign. In the past five years, the beat has worked to clean the park. Beat 4 Supervisor Johnny Rowell said that, at one point, the park was heavy with brush and debris. Brown said that Rowell had been "very instrumental in keeping it going." The park suffered some damage, but Rowell said that all lost trees have been cut into planks to be stored in a museum in Bay Springs.

Jasper County has several champion trees. According to the Mississippi Forestry Commission the area is home to the champion Red Buckeye, Winged Elm, Carolina Hickory, Shellbark Hickory, and Mimosa. Champion trees are decided on a basis of points, given in ac-

cordance to circumference of trunk, height in feet and average feet at the crown. The commission states, "The Champion Tree with the largest number of total points shall be declared champion of its species in Mississippi and shall be recognized as such in each edition of *Champion Trees of Mississippi* until a new champion is found or until the tree dies. Co-champions will be listed in the case of very close point totals (within five total points.)"



Jasper County Beat Four Supervisor Johnny Rowell and SCD Public Outreach Forester Ed Brown stand by the sign marking the Longleaf Pine Park (above left), site of the State and National Longleaf Pine (above).

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